World Chronicle

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WORLD POPULATION

In October 1999, the world's population reached the six billion mark. It has taken just twelve years for the world to add this most recent billion people. This is the shortest period of time in world history for population to increase by a billion people. Of the 78 million born each year, 95 percent live in less developed regions. On the other hand, population is getting smaller in developed countries. In this episode of **World Chronicle**, Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations discusses the socio-economic implications of population growth and decline in different parts of the globe.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

According to United Nations estimates, the world population reached the six billion mark in October. The rapid growth of the world population started in 1950, with reductions in mortality in the less developed regions. As a result, there are two-and-a-half times more human beings on earth today than there were forty years ago. What are the socio-economic implications of this growth? Can humankind continue to grow at this fast pace?

Our guest today is an expert on population issues. He is Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations. Joining me to talk with Mr. Chamie are Robert Holloway from *Agence France-Presse/AFP* and Jack Freeman of *The Earth Times* who is also the editor of the book on population published by *The Earth Times*.

Mr. Chamie, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

Mr. Chamie, I'm impressed by the accuracy of your forecasts. I was reading a book by Rafael Salas, the first head of the UN Population Fund, published in 1985, in which he was projecting world population at 6.1 billion in the year 2000. So you're pretty well on the mark with six billion in October '99. How do you account for this extraordinary accuracy? I mean economists are famously inaccurate in their forecasts but you demographers are exceptional?

CHAMIE: Yes I think the United Nations Population Division has done a remarkable job even before the '80s. They started in the late '40s with their first estimates for the year 2000 in the mid-50s and at that time they were estimating approximately 6.2 billion for the year 2000. And the basic reason is because mortality and fertility rates generally do not change that rapidly. It's only been in this century where we've seen very, very dramatic changes. And at that time they had some ideas what was happening based on the experience in the developed countries and anticipated declines in mortality being brought about by antibiotics, insecticides and improvements in sewage and water in the developing world. Very few, for example, before World War II, were anticipating such a rapid growth in the second half of the century. And in fact this century I would coin it as **the** demographic century. It's been the most impressive demographic history in the

history of humanity.

LITTLEJOHNS: How many more people you expect to arrive between October '98 and the end of -- and '99 and the end of 2000?

CHAMIE: We will go probably up to about 6.1. We're having annually right now around 78 million people being added.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you'll prove Rafael Salas' numbers?

CHAMIE: Well in fact Rafael Salas was quoting the Division because they were a fund collecting resources to distribute to developing countries and the numbers that we've been using are the same ones that have been produced.

LITTLEJOHNS: So they were working on your data?

CHAMIE: Exactly. That's the division of labour that we have.

HOLLOWAY: Some of your figures are quite striking. I mean overall we see a big increase in world population but in certain areas, certain regions, we see a quite startling drop is projected. And in Russia, I suppose this is because of growing natal mortality. But how do you explain the big drop that's projected in the South of Europe in the traditionally Catholic countries of France and -- Spain and Italy?

CHAMIE: The developed countries including Russia and particularly Western Europe went through the demographic transition early on. That transition is from high rates of death and births to lower rates and they started many centuries ago. And the rates now in Southern Europe especially are very low. Average number of children per woman in Spain and Italy for example are like 1.2 and the replacement level would be around two children per woman or per couple. These rates are very, very low for a number of reasons -- improved education, urbanization, low mortality, improved status of women, a desire not to have many children, improvements in the participation of women in the labour force all combine for people to have a desire to have smaller number of children. And many people are not marrying. You have a significant percent that remain unmarried or without any children at all.

FREEMAN: Isn't it true that even in the developing world the major growth of population has slowed?

CHAMIE: It's true this century has, as I said, was **the** demographic century. It has more gold medals for demography than any other century. It has the highest growth rate ever recorded -- two percent at the end of the '60s. It has the highest annual

increment in the late '80s at 86 million. It has the most rapid decrease in fertility, the most rapid increase in life expectancy recorded. We've gone for developing countries about 25 or 30 years ago from an average of six children per woman to now we have three. So it's a rather remarkable change attributable to many causes including a widespread availability of contraception.

LITTLEJOHNS: Speaking of contraception I've been studying some of these numbers on the percentage of people currently -- married women using contraceptives and in the more developed regions you say 70 percent but in Africa only 20 percent and this is despite the best efforts of agencies like UNICEF and the UN Population Fund. Why is it that they haven't been more successful in getting women to use contraceptives? Or men for that matter.

CHAMIE: Well if you're trying to get pregnant you won't use contraceptives. So if you're trying to have six children--

LITTLEJOHNS: But in Africa they still do. In Africa they're still determined to get pregnant?

CHAMIE: A number -- in comparison to the developed world yes. First of all the time that you're pregnant you're not using contraception. In addition the time that you're wishing to become pregnant you're not using contraception, and so on. But the proportions are, in some countries, increasingly high. There's great diversity in Africa. In northern Africa you're having very high rates relatively speaking of contraceptive use and in some of sub-Saharan Africa you have somewhat low largely because of the level of development. But we anticipate these rates will go up very, very fast.

LITTLEJOHNS: But in Latin America and the Caribbean despite the strong Roman Catholic influence, particularly in Latin America, I see the number is 66 percent which is quite unusual.

CHAMIE: We have been--

LITTLEJOHNS: What's the Pope gonna say about that?

CHAMIE: I think we've dispelled the myth that religious beliefs can affect contraceptive use. Irrespective if someone's Catholic, Hindu, Moslem, Jew they are using contraception. It's a decision made in the bedroom not in the religious institution and we've seen this in Europe. In the early '50s they were saying, 'oh Italy and Spain will have the highest fertility cause they're Catholics', they have the lowest in Europe basically.

FREEMAN: Five years ago at the UN Population Conference in Cairo the decision was taken to move away from the numbers-based approach to population towards a more education and empowerment of women approach. Has that made a difference?

CHAMIE: I think there's some misunderstanding. There was never numbers-based. When you're talking about change and progress you have to have quantitative information. You cannot talk about anything without it being quantified. Things have improved in the economy, you need a measure. Your health is improved, you need a blood count or a cholesterol count. There was never this emphasis solely on numbers. What happened was there was a shift in the emphasis talking about quality of care, reproductive issues, empowerment of women. Yes those have changed. In addition there were changes between Bucharest, the first conference, and the conference in Cairo. For example in Bucharest in the World Population Plan of Action you don't find the word sexual.

LITTLEJOHNS: You don't find what?

CHAMIE: The word sexual. You do find that though in the--

LITTLEJOHNS: Why is that?

CHAMIE: At that time it was considered something inappropriate to be discussing at a international conference.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean children were being born without sex in those days?

CHAMIE: They used euphemisms. So what's happened is you need numbers to measure progress and measure where you are. How would you measure maternal mortality going up or down if you don't have numbers? How do you measure the welfare of women in the economy if you don't have numbers on labour force participation? You need numbers. However, solely restricting your analysis or discussion to numbers is problematic and you have to take into account qualitative issues. And I think the change also is dramatic with the terms of the equality, equity and empowerment for women. That's a major shift as well.

HOLLOWAY: Can we look a moment at the socio and political implications of these figures that Michael mentioned at the beginning? Your projected figures show that over the next 50 years the aggregate population of the European Union is likely to

drop by about I think 40 to 50 million. And if you include the dozen or so candidate countries which are to the east of there you get an even bigger drop. The one exception is Turkey where you're looking at an increase of about 50 million. Does that necessarily imply big migration from Turkey into the European Union irrespective of Turkey's becoming a member or not?

CHAMIE: I don't think there's any European demographer that would say that the European population is not going to decline. Germany, Italy, Spain, most of the countries -- Czech Republic, Austria, and so on, Russia, Japan even-- will be declining in the near future if we don't see the trends in fertility changing. We do not see fertility levels from 1.2, 1.5 going back up to 2.1, 2.3.

HOLLOWAY: Right.

CHAMIE: That's the first point. The second point is the decrease is so significant that you'd have to have an enormous number of migrants to make up for the shortfall of birth. And I'll give you an example. Take Italy at 1.2. How many migrants would you have to have every year to keep the labour force constant at the '95 level? You'd have to have over 1,000 people arriving in Italy every day. You need over 300,000 people coming to Italy to make up for the deficit in the projected labour force because of the birth rate. So the Europeans have a choice. The European Union have a choice. They can have a shrunken labour force, an older population where the median age will be something like 50 or more and take the consequences of that both in terms of the pension system, social security and the age structure and all the implications from that. Or begin thinking like the United States, Canada, Australia and other countries and having a migration policy that would bring in migrants with certain skills. Where will they come from? Certainly Turkey is a candidate. There are many other candidates. North Africa, and so on. But that's a -- certainly a political issue. A very sensitive one.

HOLLOWAY: Yeah. It was only this week in fact that the European Union said that it would more seriously consider Turkey's application. But of course the implication there is Turkey would become by far the largest member of the European Union with a--

CHAMIE: A very large population, relatively speaking. No I think they will--

LITTLEJOHNS: The population of Turkey now is 70 or something? 70 million?

HOLLOWAY: It's 60 and something. Projected to be about 100 million by 2050.

CHAMIE: It's in the report. We will give you the exact number that we have right now.

LITTLEJOHNS: Must be around that?

CHAMIE: Yes. And it's growing relatively more rapidly than the other members of the European Union.

LITTLEJOHNS: On the other end of the scale I mean the population of India seems to be catching up with that of China. And I think you're projecting that by the year 2050 India will be number one in population?

CHAMIE: Yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: But I thought they had a huge programme of contraception going in India? Is it not successful?

CHAMIE: Well the rate of increase for India is significantly more rapid than China. Of the 78 million per year, India accounts for 21 percent, by itself. One out of five of the additions are in India. China in contrast is at 15 percent. So with that additional growth of course it'll eventually overcome it. And our number is approximately 2050, more precisely 2045, India will be larger than China but both of them by 2050 will be home to 1.5 billion people in each country.

LITTLEJOHNS: And the United States would still be in number three position?

CHAMIE: Yes but with Pakistan close on its heels.

FREEMAN: Speaking of US and Pakistan there's a well established principle that there was an inverse relationship between development and birth rates. When you project for the next 50 years, how do you factor in how much the developing countries are going to develop in that period?

CHAMIE: We keep the grouping the same as they are today. Of course many of the countries have changed status. Korea, Republic of Korea, is very different than it was in 1950. Singapore, Israel, Cyprus. There are many countries are in the developing regions, the less developed regions, that clearly are not by any standards developing countries. They're more similar to European standards and some of them even have higher standards than some of the European countries, Eastern European countries for example. But for comparative purposes we keep the regions the same. That's not to say

that some of them won't be developed. We project very little fertility for Korea and many of the Asian countries. You'll see many of these countries having fertility very, very low, similar to European levels. And you're absolutely correct. The higher level of development, improved status of women, more urbanization, more education people choose smaller numbers of children. The lifestyle changes. More concerned with appearance, more concerned with other matters. No need for extra hands like you needed when you were on the farm.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations.

Mr Chamie let's talk a bit about the socio-economic aspects of this situation. What changes do you see in the countries where population is going down and others where population is going up? Are the countries where population is going down going to have to engage in a huge programme of immigration into those countries? And the countries where population is going up a reverse immigration?

CHAMIE: The advantage as demographers that we have is the terms we're using are similar across countries. A birth's the same if it's in the Bronx or if it's in Bombay and a death if it occurs in Paris or if it occurs in Bolivia is the same. That's why we have such a strong analytical basis. We know for example that the European countries are going to be smaller, much smaller, and they're going to be older. And as they become older the relationship between the labour force and the people in the retirement ages is it is going to become less favorable. You'll have fewer people working for those that are retired. That means there'll be adjustments. Can they be overcome? Certainly. But that means you'll have to take some decisions. If the European Union for example or Japan decides not to bring in immigrants, they'll have a smaller labour force in their countries. Countries that are growing on the other hand are going to face the challenge of having many more people to accommodate in housing, shelter, employment and so on. So countries like Pakistan are going to see a huge increase in the number of people looking for opportunities and looking for basic services. And this will tax those countries that are unable to do it today. Unfortunately the 78 million that we're adding every year are not being spread out evenly. More than 95 percent are occurring in the developing countries and five countries account for 50 percent. That is India and China, Pakistan, Indonesia

and Nigeria. Those five countries account for nearly 50 percent of the world's additions in the world. And as I say a population, if it's growing or if it's declining, poses challenges. You have to adjust to changing demographic circumstances. The same way a businessman reacts to changes in the market, governments and citizens have to respond to changes in the demographic characteristics of their population.

HOLLOWAY: But the raw figures that are in your report I won't say disguise but behind those raw figures you do have some striking differences. You take a country like China. As far as I know China has never really exported its population. It's always had about between a third and a quarter of the world's total population. You compare that with a country like Egypt where your figures show a doubling in Egypt's population over the next 50 years and I wonder how a country like Egypt is going to manage at all especially since it depends so -- to such a great extent -- on tourism? And I wonder how the infrastructure of Egyptian tourism can withstand a doubling of its population?

CHAMIE: This is a great challenge in many of the countries -- you're absolutely right. If they're growing at say two percent they'll have a doubling in 35 years which means many of the infrastructure, the basic services, housing and other accommodations -- schooling and so on -- will be taxed greatly. And that's the challenge that these countries are facing. However, the issue in Cairo is firmly established that the couples and individuals have the right to choose the number and spacing of their children. So the difficulty comes in is having the sort of the positive incentive and disincentives within the society for people to start making decisions that may be more favourable for future development efforts.

HOLLOWAY: Actually that leads on to the point that coercive policies don't work. Is that correct?

CHAMIE: I won't say that. It depends on what aspect. I think for example--

LITTLEJOHNS: It seemed to have worked a bit in China doesn't it?

CHAMIE: Yeah. It depends on what you're talking about. Forced immunization works. You can't send a child for example in the United States to school or kindergarten unless they have immunizations. So in the mortality aspect this forced, coercive action you have to have immunization for your children. And similarly you can't walk across the border without a visa. So every country has a population policy. What comes into question is the issue relating to fertility, and there are some laws. For

example, at what age can a person get married? I don't believe the European Union permits an eight-year-old girl to get married so there are laws related to nuptuality. The questions come in however when you start talking about the number and the spacing of children. And some countries such as China has had a policy where the society has said we would like to limit the number and people in the cities should have one, those in the countryside could have two and some of the minorities could have three. And if you're going to have more than that you may have to pay some additional costs to the society -- for the cost the society is bearing for that. So I would not say that they haven't been successful. In fact it may be harder to raise fertility than to lower it as the Europeans are finding out, which is somewhat ironic.

FREEMAN: I'd like to focus for a second on the environment, the environmental impact of population because 100 years ago people had less impact on the environment than they have. Presumably 100 years from now, 50 years from now they're going to have a greater impact. Can you factor that into your numbers?

CHAMIE: It's a very difficult issue this issue of environment and population and we've been dealing with it for many, many decades and research. it's very complicated cause it not only deals with the sure numbers but it deals also with the means of consumption and production. If you're producing poliutants and you're not growing in size, you're still having a negative impact on the environment. If you're preparing and producing radioactive materials and you're not growing in size you're still having a negative effect. On the other hand all things being equal, if you're increasing by 50 percent you have enormous impact on the amount of goods that are produced and consumed and the quality of air and the water. And there are some constraints. For example, the availability of water. It's very difficult and costly to produce water, clean water. So there are some constraints in environment. It's very complex. You have to talk about what type of aspect. Are we talking about air, talking about the oceans, talking about the rivers, the forests? What part of the world? But clearly there is a relationship between population growth and environmental difficulties. And maybe next year we will have a report on that, to elaborate a bit on that. But it's always been a concern. It's been a concern since biblical times. Cutting down the trees to make ships and denuding the hills. So this will continue to be a concern.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Chamie as we all know the question of abortion is the subject of a huge debate in the United States particularly but not only in the United States. To what extent is abortion a factor in holding down population and I know the United Nations is on record as opposing abortion as a means of population control. But whether it's legal or illegal of course it happens. Is this a major factor in -- in Japan for example it's a very common form of contraception.

CHAMIE: Yes. In many of the countries, Eastern Europe especially, especially before the collapse of the Soviet Union, abortion was a widely used method for contraception. Cairo concluded, and the governments agreed, that abortion should not be a method of family planning. Everyone's agreed to that.

LITTLEJOHNS: Family planning, not contraception.

CHAMIE: Exactly.

LITTLEJOHNS: It has to be conceived to be aborted.

CHAMIE: Exactly. But I should tell you that we've done some studies, a major study, assessing the population -- abortion policies of all countries -- and 98 percent of the countries permit abortion under circumstances. For example, if the woman's life is threatened they will permit an abortion irrespective. There are a few countries that take exception with that. And then as you go with the different assumptions on the grounds to more liberal, on request, you have fewer and fewer countries. But it does have an impact of course on the fertility level. But what we see happening with the greater availability of contraception the abortion rates should be coming down because you will not have a conception therefore you won't need an abortion because you have been using other methods -- oral pill, IUDs, injections and so on.

HOLLOWAY: Could you tell us something about the impact of AIDS on population growth and region by region as well as globally?

CHAMIE: Yes. We use the numbers from UN/AIDS in Geneva for the incidence and then we take those numbers and we apply them to our projections of population and the numbers are significant. First of all the number of HIV positive people in the world is very large -- I think at the last count it was something like 33 million. And we've looked at those countries where the numbers are at least two percent of the adult population are HIV positive and included some large countries like Brazil and India as well. And in many of these countries the impact is devastating. And we estimate because

of AIDS, in the next 10, 15 years you'll lose about 60 million people because of HIV/AIDS. I give you an example. Some of the countries we estimate that based on the figures from UNAIDS that roughly a fifth of the adult population are HIV positive. Since there's no cure you, in a matter of about 10 years, are going to lose a lot of people and we estimate that the growth rate will come down significantly. For example in South Africa I think the growth rate will go from 1.5 without AIDS to 0.3 percent because of AIDS. So it's one-fifth of the level that would have occurred and you have a tremendous loss that's going to be occurring. This is a real tragedy that needs attention and we in the Division have been trying to work with our colleagues at UNAIDS, WHO and other agencies to bring the world's attention to this. And I think that it can have a decided impact on this simply to having programmes of safe sex. As soon as you start having safe sex you can stop the infection for those that don't have it and then treat the ones that don't. But the longer you wait the more severe the problems is going to become.

LITTLEJOHNS: Jack.

FREEMAN: To get back to the environmental issue there's much talk about the footprint of the human species on the planet. Has it gotten as bad as it's going to get or do you think it's going to get worse?

CHAMIE: The word bad means judgment. I try to avoid judgments on if it's good or bad. I can only tell you there will be more people, it'll be denser, there'll be much larger cities than you're seeing right now. When you were a young boy I don't think anyone imagined having cities of 20 million and 25 million and many of the situations will become much more desperate than we have today. On the other hand as we're saying, and in many of the other countries the population becomes smaller, older but there's no question that we see some negative consequences as well as some benefits. We see some benefits occurring because you will have a demographic bonus so to speak in those countries where the birth rates come down and you have a very small older population. You have a very, very dynamic population in terms of productivity and labour force cause your costs for the children and the older will be a nominal cost. But then you have to pay the piper because you have become older and you have to adjust. And that's where it becomes the socio-economic policies, age of retirement, which is really strange because you see many of the developed countries arguing for lower ages of retirement when in fact they should be arguing for the opposite. Older ages of retirement. People living longer,

there are more older people. You should work longer cause why retire at 55 when you could live to 100.

LITTLEJOHNS: You think that time is coming when people will be living to 100 I mean routinely?

CHAMIE: We estimate right now 145,000 people over 100.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Chamie, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.** I hope we'll all live to be 100. Our guest has been Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations. He was interviewed by Robert Holloway of *Agence-France Presse (AFP)* and Jack Freeman of *The Earth Times*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

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